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Ex-CIA chief says U.S. wrong in Nicaragua

By TODD SLOANE

A man uniquely qualified to comment on the issue told a Wilmette audience last Thursday that the Walker family spy case was a failure of U.S. Navy intelligence, as well as that of the the FBI and CIA.

Stansfield M. Turner, retired Navy admiral and former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a large Chicago Council on Foreign Relations gathering at the Michigan Shores Club that Navy intelligence officers should have detected changes in the lifestyle of alleged spy ring leader John Walker.

"The man was supposed to be making hundreds of thousands of dollars from passing these secrets to the Soviets. Surely, the changes in his lifestyle, such as buying cars and a plane, among other items, ought to have been noticed by someone. I think the Navy was remiss. After all, this (passing of secrets) was allegedly going on for at least 10 years."

The Walker case, in which at least five persons are alleged to have passed Navy secrets to the Soviets for up to 20 years for financial profit, was but one of several controversial and current topics addressed by Turner, who kept a full house spellbound by his accounts of espionage and intrigue. During more than an hour of speech and question and answers, only two persons left the room.

TURNER TOUCHED on several important foreign policy decisions of the last decade, including the hostage crisis in Iran and the failure of the CIA-military rescue operation, the covert war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and the "Star Wars" space defense program.

Turner was a man at home with his audience. The North Shore business and academic types who attend council gatherings were being addressed by one of their own, a former military man who is now on the boards of several corporations.

Turner is also a North Shore product, having grown up in Highland Park before going off to Amherst (Mass.) College and then a Navy career.

He was in town to promote his new book, a weighty tome called "Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition."

Turner said the Walker case illustrates the need for the various intelligence agencies within the military, the FBI in domestic surveillance and the CIA in international intelligence, to work together. "I found it one of my most difficult tasks, to get these services to share information. There are bureaucratic rivalries that have built up over the years."

TURNER PLACED the main blame for the Walker case in the Navy's hands, however. "There was no excuse for not knowing" about Walker's lifestyle changes, Walker said.

On Nicaragua, Turner agreed in part with a hostile questioner at the meeting, who had said the CIA has fought to overthrow left-wing governments in favor of right-wing governments. The questioner said that the U.S. supported Contra rebels fighting against the ruling Sandinista regime are in fact former officials of the regime of right-wing dictator Anastasio Somoza.

"In Nicaragua, I will agree, that most of the leaders of the Contras (the group fighting the Sandinista government) are in fact Somozas. I have opposed the CIA efforts against the Sandinistas. We should never be in a position where covert action is used as a substitute for an understood foreign policy.

"The actions of the CIA in Nicaragua are below the ethical standards of the United States of America," Turner declared to applause.

On another highly topical issue, Turner said he supported research funds being used to develop the Strategic Defense Initiative, commonly known as "Star Wars."

BUT TURNER broke with the Reagan Administration in saying that unless there is a serious deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union, Star Wars should not be developed or deployed.

Turner said that Star Wars, instead of being sold as a blanket, space-based protection for the entire country, is actually being designed as protection for existing missile defenses that would not even be used if Star Wars is developed.

"Let's be careful not to be sold a bill of goods, a substitute for a blanket protection of the United States that is really a reinforcement of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction" through strategic missile warfare, Turner said.

The failed hostage rescue mission in Iran, in which eight American soldiers died when two helicopters involved in the mission collided, was the worst foreign policy disaster that Turner was associated with.

While the CIA was successful in its share of the mission, namely in locating where the hostages were being held and when the mission should have been timed, the failure was pure accident. "It should have, it could have worked," Turner said.

IN GENERAL, Turner said the CIA has overcome its hostile relationship with Congress and has entered a new phase. "We

have found that it is possible for there to be congressional oversight while maintaining the secrecy needed to save lives and carry out orders," Turner said.

But Turner said there was still a danger that continued criticism of the CIA in Congress and especially in the nation's news media will turn off quality young people from considering work with the agency.

If the right people join the CIA, it can be put to uses never thought of in the past, when the agency was seen only as a Cold War instrument.

"The tremendous advances in satellite surveillance technology could be put to use for the rest of the free world. We can help peace by revealing imminent invasions of one country by another, or forecast crops and resources such as water supply, availability of minerals and so forth. This is a marvelous opportunity to stand behind our ideology," Turner said.